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On Dysentery.

[No. 69.]

By Zaccur Hall of New Jersey

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Dysentery.

No disease perhaps to which the human system is subject is more distressing in its effects, and deleterious in its nature than dysentery; it therefore becomes a subject of importance to ascertain in what it consists and the various forms in which it appears to ensure success in its treatment. It is a disease consisting, like all others "in the confused and irregular operations of disordered and debilitated nature."

Dysentery occurs more or less every autumn either in sporadic cases or as an epidemick, and always comes on with great morbid action, which soon evinces the seat of the disease to be in the bowels. It appears in all the forms of fever from the highest to the lowest grade, but in a large majority of cases

it puts on the inflammatory diathesis; It is preceded by a rigor or chill like an intermittent, succeeded by fever and all the train of symptoms that characterize an acute disease, such as headache, nausea, sickness at the stomach, and vomiting; — the belly costive and flatulent; the pulse full, frequent and strong, and imparts to the feeling a jerking motion; it varies in frequency from sixty to one hundred strokes or more in the minute.

The late Professor Dr. Barton, says that the matter thrown out of the stomach is of a mucous nature and sometimes tinged with some blood.

Dysentery does not uniformly come on with this regular course of symptoms, but appears differently in different persons, in different seasons and in the same person at different times; In some, fever appears to be the first symptom; in others a simple looseness of the belly with mucous stools, and again, in others, it comes on with griping pains in the bowels, with frequent bloody discharges, and tenesmus.

The Dysentery begins, if I may be allowed to judge,

pretty much as the great Sydenham has observed, with cold shiverings, succeeded by heat, and other febrile symptoms; but in other cases these feverish symptoms are not felt, or at least they are apparently not felt, but a griping and twisting of the bowels, or stitches in the side, with a constant fruitless straining at stool; ~~but~~ But little is discharged, ~~and that~~ and that is so thin and acrid as to wash off the mucous from the bowels, and erode their membranes, and bring on bloody discharges. The anus becomes inflamed, very tender and sore.

Cases occur in which the bowels become suffocated with excitement to such a degree as to refuse to act upon their contents; The liver refuses to secrete bile, and of course there can be no stools. Under these circumstances patients suffer considerably from the irritating matter contained in the bowels; it keeps up a constant fever and renders the patient restless. The natural excrements are seldom voided except after taking a drastick purge which carries them out; they appear in hardened balls of different sizes.

The scybala appear to be formed, in the cells of the colon of a form texture, where they remain most probably from the commencement of the complaint.

It was said by the late Dr. Barton, that worms sometimes accompany dysentery; when lecturing on this disease, he spoke of this with great emphasis and enjoined upon the class the free use of calomel whenever their presence was suspected.

In whatever way the disease begins, the symptoms are pretty nearly the same, and yields to the same remedies. The disposition to evacuate the bowels becomes more frequent and urgent as the disease advances, but when indulged, there is little else voided, than a watery or slimy matter tinged with blood.

If the bowels become ulcerated the discharges have a sanious appearance, with an intolerable fetor.

Dysentery neglected in its first stage often becomes obstinate and sometimes chronick; the stomach and bowels are weakened from the concentration of morbid excitement upon them; in fact the whole

alimentary canal becomes so depraved, that when food is taken into the stomach, it passes apparently directly through the intestinal tube seeming by little changed, and what appears remarkable, is that the rectum takes on a constricting action when the food has got no farther than just into the stomach; the appetite in general is very much impaired or lost, but sometimes morbidly increased.

Dysentery appears to be the same disease under all circumstances of its occurence, except in the degree of violence; which, as in other diseases, necessarily varies with the season, the constitution of the patient, and the degree of exposure to the exciting causes.

The fever is manifestly inflammatory; it is in some remitting, and in others of an intermitting type, and observes a diurnal or tertian period.

Another form of this disease is to be taken notice of and that is the typhus. It may be the primary form or it may from neglect degenerate in this low state of excitement; in either of which cases it is the same.

In this prostrated state of the system all the principal evacuants are hurtful, and the disease must be treated exclusively with stimuli and tonicks; if the bowels be very open with a considerable flux of blood much danger is to be apprehended. Care must be taken to prevent the life of the patient from running off by his bowels. To effect this an immediate check must be put to the flux and the bowels kept rather in a costive state. In cases of great debility, patients are uniformly to be seen lying on their backs and continue in this position as long as great prostration of strength exists.

The pulse is more variable in this form ~~of dysentery~~ than in any other in which it ever appears the disease ever appears; it beats from forty to one hundred and fifty strokes in the minute; in some it is full and round; in others small and soft, and in almost every case yielding readily to pressure. The eyes are wild and staring; the tongue and fauces are covered with a dark black crust, and the forehead smooth & polished.

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Dysentery is most unfriendly to women childhood and old age. It now and then prevails epidemically among children, at other times among the aged, and apparently affecting no one else (at least in the same way) and proves speedily mortal if the patient be not rescued ~~from the jaws of death~~ in the forming state of the disease; at other times it spreads indiscriminately and spreads with much mortality.

It is more prevalent in the country than in cities owing to the less stimulating diet of the former, while that of the latter being of a more stimulating and tonick nature, renders the bowels less liable to be acted on. It occurs particularly at the fruit season owing to the debilitating nature of that vapid aliment.

Persons who have been in the habit of living upon salt meat and other provision of the same stimulating nature are more liable to the disease, when confined exclusively to fresh &c, than those who live indiscriminately upon both; if the latter be a little tainted it prepares

the bowels for disease much sooner.

The exciting causes of dysentery are various, and act with a force according to circumstances; but I shall only mention a few of them. These are Marshmiasmata, Adiamiasmata, heat and moisture alternating with cold, exposure to night damps, fogs, the noxious vapours from stagnant ponds, lying on the damp ground, or in wet clothes, the putrid exhalation from foul straw, and a peculiar state of air. Nurses attending on dysenteric patients often become diseased from the effluvium from the foetid stools.

Perhaps the application of cold air to the body after being much heated is one of the more frequent causes of the disease.

To the chilled state of the atmosphere we may attribute its prevailing more on high situations than in low places, where bilious Intermittents &c have the predominancy; although even these often alternate with, and run into each other. It likewise alternates and terminates in rheumatism, and ophthalmia.—

Dysentery is so strongly marked and so closely allied to the billious Intermitting fever that they appear to be the same disease; and I believe them to be, and consist in the same morbid excitement differing only in the symptoms of the part diseased; It is sometimes late in making its appearance, after the billious Intermitting has been prevailing; the former usurps the throne and wears the vestments of the latter.

The greater prevalence of dysentery on high situations, owing to the cooler air in these places, which repels perspiration, produces what Sydenham happily called the fever of the season turned in upon the bowels, but which is more happily denominated by Dr. B. Rush the intestinal state of fever.

When after the first bleeding, vomiting and purging &c, the patient be not relieved, but evidently sinks; there is great danger to be apprehended of a fatal issue.

The pulse becomes weak and tremulous, the countenance falls; the patient complains of excruciating pain or no pain at all

and gnashes his teeth; the mouth becomes dry and parched, the throat sore, the wrists and ancles cold and the whole body covered with cold sweats; hiccoughs come on and ends the tragedy.

Dissections have proved to us that the intestines suffer very much from inflammation. They become thickened and ulcerated. Aphthæ have ben seen upon them. The liver and splen have likewise been found much disordered. The liver Dr. B. S. Barton observed has been found indurated, and soft. In some instances abscesses have been ~~found~~ seen.

Dr. Cleghorn, in his excellent treatise on dysentery, observes "that the splen is sometimes putrid, the gall bladder filled with dark bile, and the great guts either entirely mortified, or partly inflamed, partly mortified, the rectum being most affected." The colon remains longer diseased than the smaller intestines, and the rectum is generally the last part that recovers. The disease being thrown upon these parts, accounts for the great mischief produced. i

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I shall, in a very cursory manner mention the appearance of the blood drawn in this disease. It varies in its appearance, in the same person in different states of the system, as also in different persons. The colour of the blood alters in its appearance from a dark, to a scarlet hue. This change takes place upon first opening a vein; the blood, often, in inflammatory cases, flows in a jerking motion. In some cases crasamentum appears to predominate. If blood be drawn in the first state of the disease, it differs very much in its appearance from that taken in the later stage. The blood last drawn will put on the inflammatory crust, the former will not. The serum is almost limpid in some, and in others of a dark apple green; in some rare cases of a turbid red. Blood let from a vein in the early part of the disease, strongly cups, and throws out upon its excavated surface in gutta a pale milk like fluid, that resembles dew drops upon a cabbage leaf. The appearance of this fluid in the blood may be attributed to the violent febrile action in the system, preventing the lacteals from

performing their chylifactive function.

The treatment is pretty nearly the same in all cases of dysentery, but must be varied according to the state of the system. I shall not mention all the remedies that might be used, and which may be found in the materia medica, but those only that appear to be most powerful in their operation upon the system, and best adapted to effect a cure.

In a majority of cases the depletive remedies are found to answer best, and are most imperiously demanded. The first, most powerful and important of all others is bloodletting. In every case where the pulse is full, hard or tense, the lancet ought to be pretty freely used, especially when the disease depends upon a peculiar state of air, and be not satisfied with a single bleeding, but repeat it as often as the system may require it; it parries death, prevents obstructions in the viscera, abates the fever, lessens pain, promotes perspiration, and prepares the system for the reception of other appropriate remedies. In some cases where

there is great febrile action, vomiting is brought on by the loss of a few ounces of blood. Patients sometimes vomit most copiously while the blood is streaming from the arm.

Emeticks. These are very beneficial after bleeding. In every case where there is much sickness at stomach or even nausea; it is right and proper to employ them. They excite the stomach to revulse its ill contents, and throw them out of the system; after which all the bad symptoms will disapear. Nauseating doses of Ipecacuanha will be found of singular service.

Cathartics. These like emeticks should never be used till after bleeding, if the state of the system require it. If the disease be rather mild, lenient purges will answer best, such as castor oil, olive oil, and above all sulphur; if the disease be more violent, the more powerful purges must be imployed, as rhubarb, jalap, and calomel. If there be much bile, and the patient complains of great pain; calomel combined with a little opium; this answers a three fold purpose; it mitigates pain, evacuates the

bowels and excites a moderate salivation, which is very desirable in those cases which have a tendency to typhus. Cathartics, I am convinced have become too popular a remedy in dysentery; they are administered indiscriminately as regards the state of the system, and do a great deal of mischief. They ought at no time to be exhibited too frequently or extended too far. Where the stools are very fœtid and disagreeable, it will be found of advantage, to purge with Sulphur & Carbon combined.

In every obstinate case Mercury is to be resorted to as a dernier remedy, particularly in chronick cases. It must be given in small doses for the purpose of salivation.

Blistors. These are also found eminently useful, and may be applied to every part of the body; they act by translating morbid excitement to the skin.

The warm bath impregnated with Oak-bark is particularly beneficial in chronick cases.

Dysentery sometimes observes periodical returns; in those cases P. Bark and Serpentaria Virginiana, are to be given

either in powder or decoction with a liberal hand, in the intervals of the paroxysms.

Tenesmus must be manged by the injections of liquid laudanum, lime water, sweet oil, Gum Arabic &c.

After the fever is principally overcome, the sickness and griping relieved, and the bowels cleansed; opiates may be exhibited with advantage; they may be given five or six times a day in small doses, and larger ones at bed-time. Specacuanha combined with opium in doses of two grains of the former and one of the latter every two hours, if the stomach will bear it. This formula not only restrains the flux, and mitigates pain; but also imparts strength to the bowels and determins the fluids to the surface; which is very desirable.

Diluent & demulcent drinks are fine palliative remedies and ought never to be neglected. They blunt the acrimony in the alimentary canal, and supply the place of mucus to the inflamed bowels. The principal drinks are, rice or barley water, toast and water, linseed-tea or a decoction of starch, Gum Arabic &c; these drinks are to be seasoned and made agreeable by adding a little cinnamon water, or sugar.

The diet in dysentery should be light and sparing according to circumstances; it should be regulated by the state of the system. It should principally consist of rice, sago, arrow-root, barley-gruel, panada, and toasted wheat bread and water, made agreable by adding a little molasses or sugar.

The best mode of treating by this dysentery that I am acquainted with is, to excite a salivation as soon as possible and support the strength of the patient by stimuli and tonicks. The most efficacious of these are wine whey; it may be given from the commencement of the disease in as large doses as the stomach will bear.

Dover's powder may be exhibited every two hours. Blisters must be applyed in the first state of the disease; fomentations on the lower extremities and sinapisms to the feet & legs. Camphor, Opium & Ipecacuanha form a powder of considerable efficacy; the formula is ten grs of the former and one of each of the latter; to be taken five or six times a day or oftener if the state of the case may demand it.

The painful and extremely unpleasant nature of this formidable disease justifies and demands every endeavour to obstruct its violence and terminate its influence. The venerable professors of the University of Pennsylvania have employed their genious, reading and observation for the purpose of assisting their assiduous pupils to treat it with success. May their endeavours long and eminently contribute to diminish the diseases of suffering humanity. i